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AUTHOR Kleinbach, Russell: Allon, Natalie
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ABSTRACT

Goals, course content, and teaching processes for sociology courses for non-sociology majors are outlined. Four general goals for teaching sociology in this context are introducing concepts, methods, and theories of the discipline; providing training in conceptualization and reflection: expanding the student's cultural perspective; and enabling students to effectively control the stability, changes, and content of their lives. Teaching goals include encouraging students to examine personal goals, build self-confidence, and argue multiple sides of an issue. The content of teaching should make students aware of their own ethnocentrism and of the concept of cultural relativity. The content should also vary in format, be geared to social atmospheres in different classes, point out ambiguities and complexities on personal and social levels, and examine similarities and discrepancies between what is (social structure) and what ought to be (cultural values). In the process of teaching, the instructor should give a sense of openness and flexibility: give willing students a chance for extra work; use concrete classroom aids; learn about students; and seek relevance in sociology by focusing on student interests such as appearance, clothing, bureaucracy, and family. (Author/KC)

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THE PLACE OF SOCIOLOGY IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM OF A CAREER-ORIENTED COLLEGE

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Russell Kleinbach, Ph.D.
Natalie Allon, Ph.D.

(Paper presented at American Sociological Association meetings, Boston, Mass., August 1979)

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"The Place of Sociology in the General Education Curriculum of a Career-Oriented College"

We are presently teaching at Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, a college which offers degrees, primarily in areas of textiles and management, but does not offer a major in any of the social sciences or humanities.

We identify four general goals for sociology in this context:

First, (although this is not first in importance) is simply the introduction of the discipline, its major concepts, methods, and theories. To function effectively in modern society, graduates need to know what sociology is, what sociologists do, and the subjects and topics of concern to sociology. These graduates should be able to read sociological articles and research even if they cannot do the research. They should be able to recognize sociological theories and read them even if they cannot teach them or use them as formal theories.

The other three goals are, however, the main tasks of sociology for non-sociology majors. These three are (a) training in conceptualizing and reflection, (b) the expansion of the student's cultural perspective, and (c) empowerment over the stability, changes and content of one's life.

First, training in conceptualizing and reflection refers to the capacity to think and reflect theoretically using abstract and general concepts. In sociology these concepts include, for example, power, role, status, socialization, formal and informal structures, institution, and manifest and latent function. It is not only the meaning of these terms which the students need to learn, (nor perhaps do students need to remember the formal meanings); rather the students need to learn to think, operate, and <u>be</u> theoretical in their approach to the world/community in which they live and work and in their approach to issues and problems which they address. For example, it is a worldview shift for many students to begin conceiving their own and other persons' behavior, beliefs, and values as <u>social</u> <u>and</u> <u>historical</u> rather than natural or given, and to then begin to conceptualize and reflect upon the forces and interests which influence and shape those beliefs and patterns of behavior. The historical and socially created realities referred to here include, for example,

economic, political, and religious structures and beliefs, family structures, and sex roles. In a recent class session one of us had one of our sociology classes discuss the 1978 coal strike in terms of (a) patterns of behavior, (b) interest groups, (c) types of power, (d) types and loci of authority, and (e) the criteria to which they would appeal to legitimate the types of power and behavior which they felt were legitimate. We wanted them to learn to understand and evaluate actual, specific social issues, using (a) general concepts and principles, and (b) the empirical data available - and to do it intentionally, reflectively, and in a rationally consistent manner.

When we speak of the goal of expanding the students' cultural perspectives, we are referring to helping the students to understand and experience their own beliefs and patterns of behavior in the context and perspective of the tremendous variety of beliefs and patterns of behavior which exist in this country and cultures around the world. Sociology and anthropology, through readings, films, and speakers can and should help students' worlds to become several times larger, and in so doing increase the students' options, flexibility, and adaptability in various contexts. The task of sociology here, however, is not simply exposure, but also includes the nurturing of a conceptual awareness of the required choices and issues facing the students in the future; issues ranging from the nationalization and planned development of our energy and mineral resources, to equality for women. Even at an introductory level students can gain a perspective of living in a world context with all its variety, and they can begin to develop in a systematic way, empirically-based, rationally consistent and generalizable criteria which they can use to make judgments and decisions with reference to patterns of economic, political and social behavior, attitudes and lifestyles. By generalizable criteria we are referring to, for example, a principle such as this: Institutions and patterns of behavior are positive if they enable all members of a society to have access to that which is necessary for the self-actualization of their human potentials, and institutions are negative if they inhibit that self-actualization of members of a society.

Lastly, sociology is concerned to provide students with conceptual and theoretical tools which will enable them to more effectively control the stability, changes, and content of their lives, i.e., their personal,community, work, and political lives. This capacity follows from and with the capacity to conceptualize in abstract terms the (a) institutions (b) roles, and (c) cultural, economic, and political variables

their environment, and (d) the forces influencing or potentially influencing these factors. This capacity or power is also increased with a wider perspective of the options in our and other societies, and with an increased knowledge of how social organizations function. Empowerment really becomes possible as students internalize an awareness of how 'social' human society really is, and the extent to which they can choose and shape their economic, political and social institutions, occupations, family and life styles, the socialization of their children, and their own political, ethnic, and religious perspectives. Examples of the "socialness" of our society and of how people shape and change their world can be drawn from observing the changing social, economic and political realities of labor, minorities and women from 1879 to 1979 in the United States, or from observing planned societies such as China and Cuba.

The ground work and real beginnings of these goals can be reached in a good introductory course. Further courses in Social Theory, Social Organization, Social Problems, Criminology, Anthropology, and Family, etc., expand and build on the same process and toward the same goals.

A partial outline of goals, process and content of teaching follows:

GOALS OF TEACHING

1. Consciousness-raising; be critical toward taken-for-granted assumptions; questioning of givens; think critically about micro and macro issues and about self beyond knowing facts and answers; raise questions; connections between micro and macro orientations; pros and cons of American life.

2. Encourage students to think of relevance of sociology to personal and work lives, as power-authority issues, bureaucracy, political economy, minority-majority, conformity-deviance orientations, as well as personal freedom-determinism issues in family, friendships, life styles, interrelated with class and status issues; importance of socioeconomic status.

3. Compare sociology with other subjects taken, both in and out of the social sciences.

4. Encourage examination of own views of isms, as sexism, racism, capitalism, socialism.

5. Build up self-confidence of students, as making them realize that they can think, speak and write in essay format, beyond multiple choice and fill-in-the blank answers; work on problems that some students do not think of themselves as too bright.

6. Encourage students to see and be able to argue multiple sides of an issue -- to be able to make "cases" and build them up with evidence.

CONTENT OF TEACHING

1. Stress ethnocentrism and cultural relativity, especially about good/bad, right/wrong, normal/abnormal, conformity/deviance, healthy/sick; probe, are there universals in human behavior? Probe how and why labels are pinned on people and behaviors, as in terms of vested interests and power questions; differential use of labeling.

2. Stress how the contents and findings of qualitative and quantitative research are related to how the process of research is done, as the nature of the questions, the roles of researchers, etc.

3. Interrelate process of learning and thinking with content of what is learned; encourage criticisms of textbook content and instructor's comments; ask questions, as how is an author trying to convince the reader of a certain point of view; how does an author "sell" sociology to students.

4. Point out cognitive, cathectic and evaluative dimensions of attitudes and behaviors -- especially, emotionally and irrational components of social action, carried out under the pretenses of logics and rational schemes.

5. Point out uneasy compromises between consensus and conflict models of social action, as well as equilibrium/change foci.

6. Point out fuzziness, lack of definiteness, ambivalences, ambiguities, uncertainties, complexities on personal and social levels, as love and hate, selfishness and altruism, work and play, alienation and sociability, the accentuation and mitigation of stigma in certain social situations.

7. Point out interaction rituals, regularities, rules, and patterned occurences of phenomena beyond peculiarities and uniqueness; regularities in spite of stress on individualism; raise questions about how free the individual is to choose aspects of his or her life, or how "determined," in light of social stratification issues.

8. Vary format of teaching, as lectures, discussions, students' reports, outside lecturers, audio-visual strategies, seating patterns as in rows or in circles, teacher as leader and follower.

9. Probe Horatio Alger myth and realities; are opportunities equal for all, and why or why not? Do people not work because they are lazy, as in Elliot Leibow's Tally's Corner?

10. Teach to different social chemistries in different classes; classes do develop a group atmosphere to which content to some extent can be geared, so be sensitive to what instructor means by reactions to classes and students as "good" or "not so good."

11. Similarities or discrepancies between what is (social structure) and what ought to be or should be (cultural values).

12. Get students to express their position and back up their point of view in a particular area of learning logically, clearly and precisely. Hopefully, a course can get a student to think more deeply about an issue, whether or not a student modifies his/her position on an issue.

7. Encourage students to examine why and how they are critical to some vocabulary and concepts of sociology.

8. Get students to consider what are and what are not social problems and why.

9. Encourage students to think why and how sociology may be an enlightening and even helpful addition to their main interests in college and life as a way to approach social phenomena.

PROCESS OF TEACHING

1. The professor and students to think critically, conceptually and empirically, as lawyer backing up case with evidence and example; see different sides of issues.

2. Raise questions, not know all answers for sure.

3. Teacher as learner about students' interests and needs, about something about their background and ideology as a basis of making sociology meaningful for them.

4. Realize that some students function best on a concrete level of thinking; use ability to deal with concrete ideas to pull out larger abstractions and generalizations.

5. Give a sense of openness and flexibility for some to enjoy course beyond drudgery -- as choice of questions on exams, choice of assignments; also the use of humor and seriousness in classroom.

6. Learning on cognitive, cathectic and evaluative level -- stress not only rational and intellectual levels of learning, but emotional and moral judgment levels.

7. Realize that some do not want to be in this class and/or take this course, but they must take it as a requirement; get at resistances to course as "wasted time," just common sense, a lot of hot air, what we already know, too generalizing, abstract or intellectual, etc., distraction from major interests of students; do and do not worry about reaching all the students.

8. If willing to work, give students stabs at doing better, extra credit, conferences with instructor.

9. Use concrete classroom aids, as movies on South Africa, migrant workers, and guest lecturers, as social workers, to make material more live.

10. Capitalize on serendipity of interests of students; let students' interests and questions control the class sometimes instead of the instructor; capitalize on surprising interests of students after some resistances, as death topic; capitalize on current events, as nuclear power controversy, when relevant; probe optimism and pessimism of students on sociological themes.

11. Pause on highly charged discussions for probe, as legitimacy of prejudice and discrimination, the separate but equal or unequal treatment of some persons, as the handicapped, employment policies in reference to homosexuals, and the idea that if some social critics do not like this country, let them leave.

12. Realize that some students are struggling to "make it" in society as it is; some are not so oriented to social change.

13. Be aware of teaching as well as preaching, propagandizing, conversion tendencies of teacher and students in classroom; use classes for some didacticisms, as the giving of definitions, and free-flowing discussions -- although some students are upset if the instructor does not say if they are right or wrong in comments.

14. Probe whether it is possible or desirable for the teacher to always maintain a stance of value or ethical neutrality.

15. Show students how to back up positions and opinions intelligently and show them the fallacies of some positions; show them logical thinking in test cases, as why or why not would you as an employer hire a gay person who was active or not so active in the gay rights' movement? Get students to admit and examine gut prejudices and biases, and think about what to do about such.

16. Realize the limits of the instructor and course to get students to think in certain ways or to really change their minds (with sometimes a pretentious changing of minds to please the instructor); still insist on questions and not answers; provoking of thought in part of point of course; sometimes students think of some ideas a few years later.

17. Learn about students; take students at the points where they come from; realize that some students do not want to and cannot relate to some abstract, heavy theories, as Chicago versus Iowa schools of symbolic interaction (or get at why they should bother to care about or learn such); sometimes get in important ideas and theories through the back door, as compare Who Am I tests with participant observation studies; students like Rubin's Worlds of Pain, Kubler-Ross' books on death, Liebow's Tally's Corner; students like personalism of Shostak and systematic aspects of Light and Keller. Should teacher always give students what they like or want to hear for public relations appeal in selling sociology to students? Learning of some ideas as necessary if unpleasant medicine?

18. Reach for relevance of sociology for students, as focusing on some of their interests, as appearance, clothing, bureaucracy, family, impression management.

19. Realize that some students have a general resistance to humanities and social sciences, as they want to learn what is useful for them or what they need to know for a certain job; some do not want to learn for the fun or enjoyment of exploring and learning, but pragmatic and utilitarian thrusts. How can student be encouraged to enjoy learning for its own sake?

20. Accept or not the fact that some students do not like to do term projects, research reports; such are considered to be too much work; some regard exams as easier and taking less time and effort. Try to understand, though not necessarily accept, students' views about easy/hard, good/bad course or good/bad teacher.